

Iowa Outdoors
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
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[Hold Until April 10]

SPRING TURKEY HUNTING PREVIEW

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Winter wants to hang on, with snow flurries and morning temperatures in the 30s. There’s no better evidence of spring, though, than Opening Day of Iowa’s first turkey season.

The strutting and gobbling are underway already. As hunters step into the woods, though, Monday, April 14 (Friday the 11th for the special youth season) the chase is on. “It’s been a slow start for spring. A lot of the birds are still grouped up; large groups,” observes Todd Gosselink, forest research biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. That creates quite a sight for the hunter; watching a dozen turkeys up close; four or five of them fanning and strutting in a preseason breeding display. However, it also provides lots of extra eyes to detect the slightest twitch in the turkey woods, with virtually no vegetation yet, to mask your movement.

That’s the tradeoff for early season hunters. There’s usually more to see in the four day first season, April 14-17. Coming out of winter, too, there’s been little human activity to wise up the wary birds. On the flip side, you are competing with hens which

are not yet ready to breed. Toms would rather spend time fanning, strutting, booming and dragging wings in front of birds they *see*, than to respond to any sound you can coax from your calls. “That’s the challenge,” admits Gosselink. His advice? Get rude. “Early on? Work aggressive yelps and clucks. Call over that hen. If you can pull that hen over to you, the tom will follow.”

Iowa’s spring turkey harvest went down last year; very likely due to not every successful hunter registering his or her harvest. Still, the 16,320 turkeys reported, a 32 percent success rate stacks up well with other turkey states. “We have strong turkey numbers throughout Iowa; especially in western and northeast Iowa,” emphasizes Gosselink. “There was a slight increase in poult production in 2007. Northeast, northwest and central areas saw increases. It’s still a bit below our 10 year average, but overall, prospects look good.”

Most early season hunters want to get in place before dawn. Once in place, maybe with a couple decoys plugged into the ground, they’ll listen to the treetop show as hens start their soft yelps and toms assert themselves with early gobbles before they fly down to start the day. Most of the ‘experts’ suggest getting close—but not too close—to those roosts; maybe 100-150 yards. From there, you shouldn’t rattle the birds. Your early calls could bring in a wandering tom before he gets preoccupied with the real hens. My favorite hunt is still when I called in and dropped a big tom, hiking a half mile out to the road to wave to the landowner, as he drove by on his school bus route before 7:30 a.m.

With all the calls, blinds and tools of the trade out there, turkey hunters have a wide choice of how to get the birds to them. “It’s hard to predict how turkeys are going to respond to different calls,” admits Gosselink. “I like to have several different ones. Some birds respond better to a box call; some to a mouth call. Just try as many as you can and have some fun with it.”

By the later seasons; late April and into May, hens will be slipping off from toms to lay eggs. That’s when mid morning or early afternoon hunting can pay off. “That’s a great time to work toms; 9, 10 o’clock”, urges Gosselink, who also suggests trying different calls, in case birds have become leery of your or other hunters’ tactics.

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SPRING TURKEY HUNTING SAFETY TIPS

Hunters, hikers, bikers and more mushroom fans, should plan to wear blaze orange while walking into and through the woods during spring turkey hunting season. The brightly colored orange will help announce to others that you are not a turkey. The different shades of brown, and the red, white and blue of a turkey head are all colors to avoid.

“You definitely want to be seen from all directions while walking into and out of the woods,” said Mick Klemesrud, with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “And turkeys do not wear blaze orange.”

Klemesrud said hunters on private property should know ahead of time if anyone else has permission to hunt the same ground, during the same season. If there are other hunters out there, each hunter should know where the others will be hunting.

“Knowing the layout of the land where the hunt will take place is all part of the hunting plan,” he said. “Even if you are not hunting together, if another hunter is out there, find out where they will be hunting, when they are going out and by which route. You must be able to see the identifying features of the male turkey. Also, bag that bird in a blaze orange game bag once it is harvested and tagged to carry it out of the timber.”

Shooting at movement and stalking a turkey are two ‘no-no’s in the safety world. Make sure to identify the target *and* what is beyond the target. And stick to the hunting plan.

“The goal of each hunt is for each hunter to return safely at the end of the day,” he said. “After all, we go hunting with our friends and our family; people who are close to us. Take time to be safe. Once you pull the trigger, there is no calling the shot back.”

For more information, contact Klemesrud at 515-281-8653.

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CLEAN UP CREWS AND CAMPERS SHARE TIME IN STATE PARKS

DES MOINES - Work is well underway in Iowa state parks to fix the problems that winter brought – downed limbs, broken pipes and other repairs – as campers begin trickling in on warmer weekends.

Campers wanting to get out as soon as possible can check to see if the park has its water on by going to www.reserveiaparks.com and clicking on the pink Park Notices/Reservation Closures button. Scroll to the bottom of the page to the Water Availability table.

“We had campers in last weekend with the nice weather,” said Kevin Szcodronski, chief of the DNR’s State Parks Bureau. “One advantage for early spring camping is there are fewer people in the campgrounds, plus our parks are on some of our better fishing lakes that have excellent spring fishing.”

These early season campers will see a lot of work getting the park ready for the season. An ice storm knocked down limbs and trees in southern Iowa from Lake of Three Fires all the way to Lake Macbride. “We’re working to get the parks ready and clean up a lot of damage from the ice storm in December,” Szcodronski said.

Campers may collect any downed limbs or trees in the park to burn in their fire rings. Szcodronski said firewood is the only thing that should be burned in the fire rings and not old lumber or pallets, plastic or railroad ties. “That stuff pollutes the air and leaves behind trash and nails and junk that we have to clean out,” he said.

Parks staff are keeping an eye on the weather and once the threat of a hard freeze is gone, usually by middle April for southern Iowa, they will turn the water on in the parks. “Once the water is on, we usually have a leak or two or possibly a broken pipe to contend with, hopefully nothing major,” Szcodronski said.

The work load will lighten some when more than 200 seasonal park workers join the park staff to keep up with the mowing and general maintenance.

Notes:

The Viking Lake concession building that burned down on July 18, 2006 will open on April 15, right on schedule. A grand re-opening is scheduled for June.

Szcodronski said he is anticipating high gas prices will bring an increase in campers and visitors who choose to stay closer to home this year.

Honey Creek Resort State Park came through a tough winter and is on schedule for its August opening.

For more information, contact Szcodronski at 515-281-8674.

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SOGGY TROUT ‘OPENER’

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

More than a few trout anglers were surprised as they skidded and slogged their way down to their favorite cold water stream this week. They beat the stocking truck.

Traditionally, stocking gets underway across northeast Iowa’s ‘trout country’ the first week of April. With icy roads, remnant snowdrifts and soggy stream banks, however, many streams were inaccessible. “Melting snow and ice is making access very difficult or nearly impossible on some streams for stocking trucks,” cautions Gary

Siegwarth, manager at the Big Spring trout station near Elkader. He suggests early season anglers steer toward streams with good foot access and close proximity to parking lots or adjacent roads.

By midweek, Big Spring crews stocked some of the streams in their region. Some of the more accessible streams in the Manchester area were stocked last weekend. From Decorah, the trucks were rolling on 'opening day'; last Monday. "This is springtime in Iowa. We are going to adhere to our schedule as much as we can," offered Decorah hatchery manager Brian Malaise, as he was pelted by falling rain on a windy, 36-degree morning. There was still snow on the bluffs and hillsides, but several streams were reachable. While one truck headed out on the road, He dipped over 100 nice looking rainbows in Trout Run, as it ran through the hatchery grounds.

Crews from the three hatcheries will stock about 350,000 catchable trout in just over 50 streams throughout nine northeast Iowa counties. Most will be hatchery produced rainbow trout. About 10 percent, though, are brook trout. Brown trout were stocked for years. Now, though, with about 100 miles of streams supporting natural reproduction and with other stretches getting hatchery fingerlings, the big browns you see *grew* to that size in the stream. Trout anglers pay for the extra work and expense of producing the coldwater fishery through purchase of their \$13 trout 'stamp' each year.

And a handful of them were trying to ignore the near freezing rain, last Monday. "I fish all winter. Got my limit last weekend," grinned Ed Macel. "There are old fish in here. I came down one day (late this winter) and there was one, must have been eight-pounds, in here. I couldn't get him to my line, though." Macel was using a home-recipe dough ball; one of a couple different ones he tries.

"A good percentage of the anglers around here fish from November til April," agreed Malaise "About the time we start stocking again, the (Mississippi) River is open again or they go to other streams. "These winter anglers are fishing for holdover trout. They often fight better. A lot of anglers say the fish that have been in the stream for weeks or months taste better, too."

Fisheries biologist Bill Kalishek had been on three Decorah area streams over the last week; catching fish at each one. "A nice 13-inch rainbow on Bloody Run; a 15-inch brown on Otter Creek, with a lot of 10-to 11-inch browns, too," relayed Kalishek.

Now, with those holdover fish being joined by hatchery stocked trout, the lure of the stream is more pronounced. And if you aren't too excited about human company, those northern streams are just for you. The hatcheries stock about twice as many trout per angler seen on those streams. Toward the southern reaches; mostly in the Manchester area, it is not unusual to have 40, 50 even 65 anglers stretched along one stream. Being just an hour and a half from Iowa City, and even closer for anglers from Cedar Rapids, Waterloo and Dubuque, they simply attract bigger crowds.

That's why those hatchery biologists suggest you 'Go North,' for a special angling treat. "The rainbows have that distinct pink streak on the side. The spotting pattern is really noticeable, too," suggests Kalishek. "Nice looking fish."

And more of them, as those rag-tag snowdrifts finally disappear and full stocking gets underway.

Early Trout Tips

...high water lures. With most streams running at higher volume this spring—and maybe a little muddy—bright colors seem to work more. "Something silver, maybe bright yellow; a bright, attractive color," suggests Malaise, from Decorah. "You may have to add a little weight to your line, to get your lure down off the top of the fast moving water."

...Patience. With snow melt keeping water temperatures in the 40s, it takes newly stocked trout a few minutes or so to acclimate. They've been riding in 50 degree hatchery water. Those few degrees make a difference.

...Flexible rods. Trout are tremendous fighters. A rod that bends all the way to the tip will keep more fish on the line; than losing one with a stiff fishing pole.

...Unannounced Streams. Like the more remote, northern streams, streams which receive unannounced stockings get little angler pressure. Unannounced streams are shown in the DNR Trout guide, available at most eastern Iowa DNR offices and many sporting goods counters.

Better April spots

Better access means areas such as Little Paint, Paint, Mink, Otter Creeks, Trout Run and Sny Magill should see their regular stockings early in the season. The trout pond at the entrance to Big Spring hatchery is stocked and holding good numbers of trout, too.

The DNR trout stocking schedule is online. Go to www.iowadnr.gov , click on Fishing/Fishing Report, then Trout stocking. You can also try the (recorded) stocking hotline at 563-927-5736.

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MIGRATING WATERFOWL HERALD CHANGE OF SEASON

Iowa Wetlands Offer Spectacular Spring Viewing

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Freed from their five month entombment beneath ice and snow, Iowa wetlands are returning to life. And although local weather conditions may offer some brief but chilly set backs, there is no denying that spring has arrived.

For legions of Iowa marsh watchers, the noisy return of waterfowl is an annual call to arms. Equipped with binoculars, tripods, cameras, and spotting scopes, human observers head for the water. At the busiest locations, waterfowl viewers may collect in public wetland parking lots. Serving as instant information centers, it's where perfect strangers compare notes on who's seen what. Other enthusiasts, usually younger members of the crowd, go so far as to don rubber hip boots in order to "wade in among 'em" for a closer look. Once sequestered among thick cattails in some remote corner of the marsh, their willingness to brave mud and cold is rewarded with the best view and most stunning photos.

Although many of the water birds currently seen on local wetlands will stay to lay eggs and rear young, the vast majority are simply visiting. For many species, Iowa is merely a half way point in the thousands of miles that separate southern wintering areas and remote northern breeding grounds.

Time is of the essence. Because so many of the birds still have so far to travel, the stop will be brief. After pausing to refuel on abundant stores of sago pondweed, arrowhead, and other nutrient rich marsh plants, the flocks will quickly resume their flight. Guided by invisible magnetic fields, stars, and forces known only to the birds themselves, the spring migration represents an epic journey that has intrigued earthbound onlookers for countless generations.

But there's no time to waste. Northern snow lines are in rapid retreat. Here Today -- Gone Tomorrow is the official motto of North America's winged migrators. Waters that support a virtual blanket of clamoring birdlife one day, may be comparatively silent the next. Delaying the visit to your favorite wetland, could mean you'll miss the entire show.

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CAMERA TO FEATURE OSPREY YOUNG LIVE ON THE WEB

There are plans are again this summer for osprey placements in July at Clear Lake, Red Rock, White Rock Conservancy, Spirit Lake, and Dubuque. Ospreys are relocated to Iowa from Brainerd, Minn. and Hayward, Wis.

Earlier sites include Macbride Raptor Project (three nesting pairs), Hartman Reserve (one nesting pair), Polk County Conservation Board (CCB) (one nesting pair), Boone CCB (one nesting pair joined by eagle nesting pair at Don Williams), Linn CCB (two nesting pairs).

There was an unsuccessful nesting attempt at Lake Rathbun last year due to high water in June. Linn County Conservation Board at Wickiup Hill has established a webcam at <http://webcam.linncounty.org/> for osprey viewing.

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IOWA TREE ENTHUSIASTS HONORED

DES MOINES - Outstanding individuals dedicated to statewide tree planting and conservation efforts were honored April 3 by officials with the Iowa Urban and Community Forestry Council (IUCFC).

Individuals from 65 Iowa communities came together in Des Moines to attend the “Trees & Technology – Bag the Benefits” awards luncheon and to be recognized for their service to various local tree planting efforts.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) deputy director, Liz Christiansen, was in attendance to express thanks and gratitude to Iowans statewide volunteer and professional urban foresters.

“Volunteers, like trees, are important pillars in our communities,” Christiansen said. “We are here today to honor your service and commitment to your communities and a better Iowa.”

Pete McRoberts, deputy press secretary to the Governor, also attended the event and read a proclamation signed by Governor Chet Culver commemorating April as Arbor Month in Iowa.

“Just doing what we enjoy” was the common phrase expressed by for award winners when discussing why they contribute to state forestry efforts. Mike Jensen, president of Story City Trees Forever, says that it’s really not something you think about, it’s just something you want to do.

“We are just doing what we enjoy,” Jensen said. “We certainly don’t expect to get an award for doing something fun, but it’s always nice to be recognized.”

Winners of the 2008 Arbor Day Poster Contest were also announced at the event. Third place went to Nancy Garcia of Clinton, second place went to Pooja Patel of Dubuque, and first place honors were given to Chance Johannsen of Albert City, who will now advance to the national poster competition.

IUCFC awards were presented to groups and individuals in the following categories:

- Outstanding Volunteer Award: Julie Ehresman, Stratford; Sister Mary Ann Phelan, Clinton; Patrick Minnick, Rockwell City
- Outstanding Professional Award: Todd Derifield, Waterloo
- Outstanding Youth Award: Waverly-Shell Rock Environmental Club
- Outstanding Community Organization Award: North Central Correctional Facility, Rockwell City
- Outstanding Local Partner Award: Mason City Noon Rotary
- Chairman's Award: Eric Faaborg, Cedar Rapids

Event sponsors including Aquila, Alliant Energy, Iowa Arborist Association, MidAmerican Energy, Telephone Pioneers, and Trees Forever were also recognized for their support and contribution.

The Iowa Urban and Community Forestry Council consists of statewide entities focused on increasing and maintaining Iowa's forestry resources. The council is comprised of 27 representatives from state and national organizations including the U.S. Forest Service, Iowa State University Extension Service, the Iowa DNR and Trees Forever. The council is dedicated to addressing such forestry issues as improvement and expansion of existing urban and community trees, diversifying tree composition and eradication of invasive species, as well as the expansion of forestry education and volunteer efforts within and among Iowa communities.

For more information, please contact Randy Cook at (515) 281-5600 or at Randy.Cook@dnr.iowa.gov.

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PRAIRIE RESCUE EVENT SET FOR FAYETTE COUNTY

Volunteers of all ages will help rescue a prairie at more than 15 sites throughout Iowa during the months of March, April and May.

The public is invited to help with an April 8 prairie rescue event at Volga River Recreation Area, in Fayette County. For a complete listing of all Iowa prairie rescue sites online, go to www.inhf.org/prairierescue2008.html The events are also listed on the Iowa DNR Keepers of the Land events calendar at www.iowadnr.com/volunteer/index.html.

This is an annual event coordinated by the Iowa DNR with support from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, county conservation boards and private conservation groups.

For more information, contact Whitney Davis, with the Iowa DNR, at 515-281-6271, or Whitney.Davis@dnr.iowa.gov.

Today, only about 1/1,000th of Iowa's prairie remains. These small prairie remnants, even those in public ownership, are still at risk from encroaching species and the lack of historic fire and grazing patterns.

Prairie Rescue volunteers will clear invasive species such as brush and small trees from the sites. Experts will conduct controlled burns on some of the prairies. These efforts will allow adults and kids to experience the prairies Iowa's earlier generations saw, while preserving that experience for future generations.

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